

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 276.7

(1) Natural disasters or civil disorders that adversely affect Program operations;

(2) Strikes by State agency staff;

(3) Change in SNAP or other Federal or State programs that result in a substantial adverse impact upon a State agency's management of the Program; and

(4) Any other circumstances in which FNS determines good cause to exist.

(b) If FNS determines that food cause existed for a State agency's failure to comply with required provisions and standards, FNS shall not suspend or disallow administrative funds nor seek injunctive relief to compel compliance with the provisions and standards.

[Amdt. 168, 45 FR 77263, Nov. 21, 1980]

§ 276.7 Administrative review process.

(a) *General.* (1) Whenever FNS asserts a claim against a State agency, the State agency may appeal the claim by requesting an administrative review. FNS claims that may be appealed are billings resulting from financial losses involved in the acceptance, storage, and issuance of coupons (§276.2), billings based on charges of negligence or fraud (§276.3), and disallowances of Federal funds for State agency failures to comply with the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, regulations, or the FNS-approved State Plan of Operations (§276.4).

(2) A State agency aggrieved by a claim shall have the option of requesting a hearing to present its position in addition to a review of the record and any written submission presented by the State agency. Unless circumstances warrant differently, hearings of appeals of negligence claims and disallowances of Federal funds shall be before an Appeals Board and hearings of appeals of other claims shall be before a single hearing official. In any case, the people reviewing the claim shall be people who were not involved in the decision to file the claim.

(b) *Notice of claim.* When asserting a claim against a State agency, FNS shall provide the notice to the State agency using any delivery method as long as the method provides evidence of the delivery.

(c) *Filing an appeal.* A State agency aggrieved by claims asserted against it

may file written appeals with the Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture, c/o the Executive Secretary, State Food Stamp Appeals Board, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, Washington, DC 20250, requesting an opportunity to present information in support of its position. The State agency shall attach a copy of the FNS claim to its appeal. Appeals must be filed with the Executive Secretary or postmarked within 10 days of the date of delivery of the notice of claim. If the State agency does not appeal within the prescribed 10-day period, the FNS decision on the claim shall be final. No extension shall be granted in the time allowed for filing an appeal.

(d) *Computation of time.* In computing any period of time prescribed or allowed under these procedures, the day of delivery of any notice of action, acknowledgment, or reply shall not be included. The last day of the period so computed shall be included unless it is a Saturday, Sunday or Federal or State holiday. In that case, the period runs until the end of the next day which is not a Saturday, Sunday or Federal or State holiday.

(e) *Stay of administrative action.* With one exception, the filing of a timely appeal and request for administrative review shall automatically stay the action of FNS to collect the claim asserted against the State agency until a decision is reached on the acceptability of the appeal, and in the case of an acceptable appeal, until a final determination has been issued. The exceptions to this provision are those claims that are asserted against State agencies due to State agency failure to comply with an order to reduce, suspend or cancel benefits in accordance with §271.7. In situations where a State agency does not reduce, suspend or cancel benefits as directed and FNS takes action to disallow administrative funds or bill the State agency, the disallowance and/or billing shall remain in effect during the review process. Should the Appeals Board uphold the State agency, all disallowed funds and/or funds collected as a result of the billing shall be restored to the State agency promptly.

(f) *Acknowledging an appeal.* Upon receipt of an appeal and request for administrative review, the Executive Secretary shall provide the State agency with a written acknowledgment of the appeal, including a statement of whether or not the appeal is timely and can be accepted. A copy of each acknowledgment shall be provided to FNS. The acknowledgment of a timely and acceptable appeal and request for administrative review shall also include a copy of Secretary's Memorandum No. 2003, Revised, "State Food Stamp Appeals Board," and the identity of the Appeals Board member(s) designated by the Secretary to review the claim.

(g) *Submitting additional information.* (1) State agencies shall have 30 days from their request for an appeal to submit five sets of the following information to the Executive Secretary of the Appeals Board:

(i) A clear, concise identification of the issue or issues in dispute;

(ii) The State agency's position with respect to the issue or issues in dispute;

(iii) The pertinent facts and reasons in support of the State agency's position with respect to the issue or issues in dispute;

(iv) All pertinent documents, correspondence and records which the State agency believes are relevant and helpful toward a more thorough understanding of the issue or issues in dispute;

(v) The relief sought by the State agency;

(vi) The identity of the person(s) presenting the State agency's position when a hearing is involved; and

(vii) A list of prospective State agency witnesses when a hearing is involved.

(2) At the request of the Executive Secretary, FNS shall promptly submit five complete sets of all documents, correspondence and records compiled by FNS in support of its claim.

(3) The Executive Secretary shall provide each person hearing an appeal and FNS with a complete set of the State agency information when it is received. The Executive Secretary shall also provide each person hearing an appeal and the State agency with a com-

plete set of the information supplied by FNS when it is received.

(h) *Scheduling and conducting hearings.* When a hearing is afforded, the Appeals Board or hearing official has up to 60 days from receipt of the State agency's information, outlined in paragraph (g) of this section, to schedule and conduct the hearing. The Executive Secretary shall advise the State agency of the time, date and location of the hearing at least 10 days in advance of the hearing. The State agency is solely responsible for ensuring the attendance of all State agency witnesses at the hearing.

(1) A hearing is an informal proceeding designed to permit the State agency an opportunity to present its position before a neutral third party. Because the final determination is subject to judicial review and trial *de novo*, the Appeals Board and hearing official shall not be bound by the rules of civil procedure applicable in the court or by the adjudicatory requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act.

(2) The Appeals Board Chairman, his designee or the hearing official is the presiding officer at the hearing. The presiding officer shall have full authority to ensure a fair and impartial proceeding, avoid delays, maintain order and decorum, receive evidence, examine witnesses, and otherwise regulate the course of the hearing. The State agency may represent itself at the hearing or be represented by counsel.

(3) The Appeals Board or hearing official shall receive into evidence the oral testimony of State agency witnesses and any documents which are relevant and material. Neither the Department nor FNS is required to present witnesses at the hearing. However, the Department and FNS shall make staff available to provide any information or clarification requested by the Appeals Board or hearing official. Under no circumstances shall the Department or FNS introduce new evidence at the hearing. Departmental and FNS staff, as well as State agency witnesses, shall be subject to examination by the Appeals Board or hearing official. Departmental and FNS staff shall not be subject to cross-examination by State agency representative or counsel. Likewise, State agency witnesses shall not

be subject to cross-examination by Departmental or FNS staff. Each side shall be permitted to make a closing statement to the Appeals Board or hearing official upon completion of the taking of evidence and testimony.

(4) FNS and the State agency shall have the opportunity to submit additional written information to the Appeals Board or hearing official within 10 days after the close of the hearing. No new factual material may be introduced except as it directly relates to evidence or testimony presented at the hearing. Five complete sets of such information must be filed with the Executive Secretary or postmarked prior to the expiration of the 10-day deadline for it to be considered.

(5) An official verbatim transcript of each hearing shall be kept on file in the Office of the Executive Secretary for public inspection. A copy shall be furnished to FNS and the State agency. Anyone wishing to purchase a copy may make arrangements to do so with the commercial reporting service involved.

(i) *Final determination.* (1) When a hearing is afforded, a final determination shall be made within 30 days of the hearing, and the final determination shall take effect 30 days after delivery of the notice of this final decision to the State agency. When a hearing is not held, a final determination shall be made within 30 days after receipt of the State agency's information. The final determination shall take effect 30 days after delivery of the notice of the final decision to the State agency.

(2) The Appeals Board or hearing official shall either uphold the claim, deny the claim, or adjust the claim downward in such amounts and for such reasons as the Appeals Board or hearing official shall determine and declare. The final determination is not subject to reconsideration.

(j) *Judicial review.* State agencies aggrieved by the final determination may obtain judicial review and trial *de novo* by filing a complaint against the United States within 30 days after the date of delivery of the final determination, requesting the court to set aside the final determination. The final determination shall remain in effect during the period the judicial review or

any appeal therefrom is pending unless the court temporarily stays such administrative action after a showing that irreparable injury will occur absent a stay and that the State agency is likely to prevail on the merits of the case.

(k) *Extension of time.* (1) No extension of time shall be permitted a State agency in which to file an initial request for an administrative review. All other requests from the State agency or from FNS for the extension of any deadline contained in §276.7 of these regulations or imposed by the Appeals Board or hearing official shall be granted only for good cause shown and only when received by the Executive Secretary before the expiration of the particular deadline involved. All requests for an extension shall be in writing. Filing a request for an extension stops the running of the prescribed period of time. When a request for an extension is granted, the requester shall be notified in writing of the amount of additional time granted. When a request is denied for being untimely or for cause, the requester shall be notified and the prescribed period of time shall resume from the date of denial.

(2) The Appeals Board or hearing official may grant itself such additional time as it may reasonably require to complete any of its assigned responsibilities. If the Appeals Board or hearing official does find it necessary to grant itself an extension of time, the Executive Secretary shall notify all parties in writing.

[Amdt. 168, 45 FR 77263, Nov. 21, 1980, as amended by Amdt. 274, 51 FR 18752, May 21, 1986; Amdt. 356, 59 FR 29714, June 9, 1994; Amdt. 397, 70 FR 72354, Dec. 5, 2005]

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